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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000895

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAAD HARIRI CONFIDENT MARCH 14 WILL RETAIN FINANCE AND JUSTICE MINISTRIES

REF: A. BEIRUT 884

[B](#). BEIRUT 733

[C](#). BEIRUT 790

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (C) Parliamentary Majority leader Saad Hariri stated with confidence on June 13 that President Michel Sleiman would appoint acceptable candidates to the Defense and Interior Ministries, that March 14 would retain the Finance and Justice Ministries, and that the opposition would choose the Foreign Affairs Minister. Competition for March 14 Maronite ministerial seats between Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea and former President and Kataeb (Phalange) leader Amine Gemayel would be resolved, and the cabinet would be formed by next week, he believed.

[12.](#) (C) Saad stressed the immediacy of resolving Shebaa Farms so that newly-elected President Sleiman could take credit instead of Hizballah. An immediate resolution, carried out as part of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, would bolster March 14's position, and weaken that of Hizballah, in forming a national defense strategy, expected to begin once a cabinet is formed.

NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT
DEFENSE, INTERIOR, FINANCE
AND JUSTICE MINISTRIES

[13.](#) (C) The Charge, DCM, and PolOff met Saad Hariri plus advisors Ghattas Khoury and Nader Hariri at Qoreitam on June 13. Saad expressed his confidence that March 14 will retain the Finance and Justice Ministries, and that President Michel Sleiman will choose candidates for the Defense and Interior Ministries. Saad relayed that Sleiman had spoken on the telephone with Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun earlier in the day to dissuade him from demanding the Interior Ministry. Regarding Aoun's reported demand that his bloc, part of the opposition, get one of the sovereign ministries (Defense, Interior, Finance) in addition to the one sovereign ministry position that almost certainly will go to an opposition Shia (Foreign Affairs), Saad stated, "If anyone gets two sovereign (key) ministries, it should be March 14."

¶4. (C) Separately, PM-designate Fouad Siniora told the press today (June 13) that he telephoned Aoun to discuss the cabinet formation. Siniora stated that "national and security interests require" giving the Defense and Interior Ministries to the President.

¶5. (C) Saad reported that Amal MP Ali Hassan Khalil told him that the opposition would accept the Foreign Affairs Ministry, but Saad did not believe it would be filled by Speaker Nabih Berri's brother, Mahmoud. Aoun will likely take the Energy Ministry (Ref A), Saad anticipated. To the Charge's inquiry as to whether the cabinet would be formed by next week, Saad responded, "Yes, I think so."

MARONITE COMPETITION
WILL BE RESOLVED

¶6. (C) Explaining why Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea is demanding two ministries for his party (when he only has five MPs), Saad said that Geagea is using Aoun's rhetoric regarding the need to enlarge Christian representation in the cabinet. Saad assured us that March 14 would "resolve" this, saying it is "impossible" to meet the demands of both Geagea and former President and Kataeb (Phalange) leader Amine Gemayel.

¶7. (C) Saad reasoned that while Aoun, the Christian leader in the opposition, was defending his ally Hizballah's arms and role in the May clashes, Saad's nominal allies in March 14, Geagea and Gemayel, "lack the guts to defend what they stand

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for -- their alliance with March 14 and with Sunnis." He acknowledged that Geagea is more forthcoming, but it is not sufficient. "At the same time," Saad continued, "Aoun is losing support. Geagea and Gemayel have to be careful that they too do not lose support."

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT,
MARCH 14 ALLIES FOR ELECTIONS

¶8. (C) "March 14 must bolster independent, rather than party-aligned, candidates who agree with March 14's ideology in key areas, such as Zahle and Batroun, for the parliamentary elections," Saad recommended. "This way, they are not easily subjected to attacks by the opposition," he explained. Saad dismissed Tripoli MP Mosbah Ahdab's likelihood of becoming a minister in the next cabinet, relaying that he told Ahdab he would select him, along with other young candidates, in the future if Saad becomes PM in the future. Saad advised Ahdab to be patient, and told us that if Ahdab abandons March 14 out of pique, "so be it."

IMMEDIACY OF RESOLVING
SHEBAA FARMS

¶9. (C) Noting that the Doha agreement (Ref B) stipulates a national dialogue and the formation of a national defense strategy after a cabinet is formed, Saad remarked that if Shebaa Farms is resolved before the dialogue commences, March 14 will be better-positioned to discuss the defense strategy, and by extension, disarming Hizballah.

¶10. (C) "Nevertheless," Saad cautioned, "Hizballah's arms are tied up with Iran so it is a regional issue." He said he hoped the U.S. would pressure Israel on Shebaa so that there will be a reason to disarm Hizballah. "This will test the seriousness of both Israel and Syria in their peace negotiations," he asserted.

¶11. (C) Saad said it is important to frame a resolution on Shebaa as a victory for the GOL and an implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. He recommended that a

resolution be found at the beginning of Sleiman's term so that the President receives credit, not Hizballah.

UNIFIL SHOULD INCREASE
IN ANTICIPATION OF RESOLUTION

¶12. (C) Noting that UNIFIL currently has approximately 13,000 troops deployed in southern Lebanon, Saad anticipated that UNIFIL should be enlarged to 18,000 to 20,000 troops if Shebaa is turned over to the UN. He mentioned that later this month, the UN would meet to discuss UNIFIL and should therefore consider the impact of an imminent resolution on its operations. Saad asserted that Israel would be comforted by a UNIFIL decision to increase its troop level.

TENSIONS STILL SIMMERING
AFTER MAY CLASHES

¶13. (C) "The events of May 7, 8, and 9 led to a hatred, from both the opposition and the majority," Saad stated matter-of-factly. He added that the ease with which the opposition took over Beirut had sent a dangerous message to Sunnis, who feel they were insulted and do not have anyone to protect them. Referring to the post-Doha low-level yet continuous clashes in Bekaa and Beirut, Saad said that the threat of a rise in Sunni extremism is still present. Saad wondered what "Damascus will send next. . . whether it is al-Qaeda, or resembles al-Qaeda, it will be dangerous."

¶14. (C) Saad noted that the "full story was not yet known" regarding the May 31 bombing at an Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) G-2 (military intelligence) branch office at Abde in northern Lebanon. He explained that the slain LAF soldier's fingers had been blown off, leading some to conclude that he could have planted the bomb himself, as well as the two unexploded devices found yesterday on Abde road near the

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Kleyate airport.

¶15. (C) "The LAF G-2 has been as offensive to Sunnis as Hizballah," Saad declared. He told us that the G-2 had gone to stop someone in Tarik Jdedieh, a Beirut neighborhood, and shot him unnecessarily. According to Saad, the LAF G-2 is trying to start clashes between the army and the Lebanese citizens. (Note: Saad is much closer to the Internal Security Forces, headed by fellow Sunni General Ashraf Rifi. End Note)

APPOINTING HEAD OF LAF G-2,
ISF INFORMATION BRANCH

¶16. (C) Saad said he was pleased with Sleiman's position on the ISF (intelligence bureau). Saad said that by contrast, the LAF G-2 is "only good at catching Israeli informants"; i.e., not Syrians or others, because "it does not consider Syria an enemy." He continued, "The LAF should not operate in cities like a National Guard, but instead should be deployed to the borders and conducting training at its bases." He emphasized that the ISF, as a police force, should be deployed in urban areas, not the LAF.

¶17. (C) He suspected that the two roadside bombs discovered in the north the previous day were a "message" to Second Brigade Commander BG Jean Kawahji, a contender to become the next LAF Commander. Saad pointed to Hizballah Secretary General's last speech, when he emphasized that the LAF should not take sides, as evidence.

¶18. (C) Meanwhile, Saad joked, no similar threatening message was sent to LAF G-2 Director General BG Georges Khoury because "he is Syria and Iran's candidate." Saad assured us, "Don't worry, I will make PM-designate Fouad Siniora resign

if Khoury is named the next LAF Commander. It is a red line for me." He noted that he was shocked by Geagea's support for Khoury (Ref C).

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